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ABSTRACT

The principal of the school needs to be highly knowledgeable of how reading should be taught. He/she must know the different psychologies and philosophies of reading instruction. Word recognition techniques and diverse comprehension skills should also be in the repertoire of the school principal. The principal must work in the direction of helping teachers teach so that students achieve at a higher rate in reading, the first of the 3Rs. And school administrators are being held accountable for student test results. This paper first discusses the different psychologies of reading instruction and of teaching in general. The paper then considers the principal's knowledge of word recognition skills and of reading comprehension skills. It states that a positive learning environment is necessary in which students can develop a feeling of belonging and are recognized for achievements in reading. (Contains 12 references.) (NKA)

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# Reading Progress and the School Administrator.

by Marlow Ediger

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## READING PROGRESS AND THE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR

The school administrator needs to take a lead in improving the reading curriculum. With state mandated standards and tests, the challenges for ever higher reading achievement scores has been emphasized, for better or for worse. The administrator is being evaluated, in part, by test score results from students in school. How much influence, he/she has on raising test scores would be open to debate. Accountability is a key concept stressed in the testing and measuring of student achievement. Thus, school administrators are being held accountable for student test results. The principal is the closest in relationships of any school administrator with classroom teachers and thus is assumed to exert a leading influence on learner progress. The principal should have considerable influence on teachers and students in a school. Thus, the principal must work in the direction of helping teachers teach so that students achieve at a higher rate in reading, the first of the 3 rs. Reading is receiving major emphasis in society in which students are to read on grade level as a minimum.
What might a principal do to assist teachers to guide optimal learner achievement in reading?

### The School Principal and the Reading Curriculum

The principal of the school needs to be highly knowledgeable of how reading should be taught. He/she must know different psychologies and philosophies of reading instruction. Word recognition techniques and diverse comprehension skills should also be in the repertoire of the school principal. Certainly, it is vital that principals be able to implement that which assists teachers to do a good job of teaching reading (Ediger, 1977, 93-95).

In terms of psychologies of reading instruction, the following are salient:

1. behaviorism with its stress placed upon measuring learner achievement in reading. Percentiles, grade equivalents, standard deviations, and stanines are then provided as results of learner achievement from test taking. A numeral signifies how well a student is doing in reading achievement. The state department of educator may prescribe what students are to be tested upon. The test may be developed on the state level or it may be a standardized test developed by a commercial company. In its extreme use, exit exams given to students need to be passed in order to receive a high school diploma.

2. humanism with its emphasis placed upon student decision making in the reading curriculum. Here, students choose sequential library books to read. After the reading of a book, the student may have a conference with the teacher to assess comprehension and other reading skills. The student has heavy input into the assessment process. The focal point is upon the student when humanism, as a psychology of learning, is being emphasized in the reading curriculum. The student here does much choosing and selecting (Ediger, 2001, 22-26).

Philosophies of teaching which may be implemented include idealism with its idea centered beliefs in curriculum development. The idealist cannot know the real world as it objectively exists, but can receive ideas pertaining thereto. Ideas are more abstract as compared to attempts at measuring numerically that which students have achieved. An idea centered reading curriculum is then in evidence. The idealist believes strongly in generalizations that are stressed in life, such as the living by the Golden Rule, among others. Then too, reading to develop generalizations is also very important. To assess reading comprehension, discussions lead by the teacher or a peer in collaborative work is highly recommended. Discussions involve use of abstract words as does the content which is abstracted from reality. A subject centered curriculum is highly recommended by idealists. Mind is reality rather than the external world, since the mind and its intellectual endeavors make sense out of what is experienced. The late Mortimer Adler (1902- 2000) was a leading advocate of idealism/perennialism. Adler (see Roberts, 2001, 61-63) developed the Paideia reading curriculum for teaching and understanding.

Mortimer Adler advocated a classical reading curriculum made up of writings pertaining to those whose ideas have survived in time and space. Recently written literature does not meet this criteria. In the author's high school and college experiences, he read and was fascinated with classical writings such as The Republic by Plato, Treasure Island by Robert Louis Stevenson, The Children's Hour by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Romeo and Juliet by Shakespeare, among others. Ideas gleaned by students from these writings are to be evaluated in a dynamic discussion with everyone participating in the classroom setting. Measurement of achievement is not the important item; rather the excitement and joy of reading classical literature are musts! Recently written literature such as Catcher in the Rye by J. D. Salinger, for example, would not be classified as being classical. Classical

literature is highly important even though it was written some time ago (Ediger, 2001, 45-47).

A second philosophy of reading instruction to emphasize is existentialism. Existentialists believe strongly in personal decisions of the student to be the deciding element in determining what to read in the curriculum. The feeling dimension is very thoroughly involved in making these choices. Human beings have personal feelings and each person is unique. Individuals are continually choosing and making judgments on an individual basis as to what to pursue in life. Meaning then for choosing resides within the chooser. Library books here need to have content which deal with the dread of needing to select a plan of action to implement from among alternatives, fear in making awesome choices, realizing self responsibility for decisions made whereby others cannot be blamed for occurred outcomes, and the futility of life itself in which the death of the individual will eventually come about in life and living (Ediger, 1998, 181- 184).

Feelings of the student need to be discussed and how these may vary in different situations. They need to identify with persons in literature who faced every day situations with fear and trembling. The content may be discussed individually with students or within a small group. Doing well in testing situations is not of ultimate importance, but rather how students can relate directly to feelings of individuals in library books and can understand these feelings with empathy in a multi-cultural society (Ediger, 1986, 4-9).

Third, a philosophy of realism via programmed reading may be stressed, either in textbook form or by way of computerized programmed materials. Programmed reading materials may be tutorial, simulation, drill and practice, as well as diagnostic/remediation. Tutorial programmed textbook or computerized versions will be discussed here. Thus, the student reads a sentence or short paragraph, responds to a multiple choice test item covering content read. If the student responds correctly by comparing his/her response with that provided by the programmer, he/she is rewarded and progresses to the next sequential reading item. If not successful in responding, the student has noticed and seen the correct answer and is still ready to move on to the next ordered item. Read, respond, and check, are used continuously in programmed materials of reading instruction. The plan of instruction is almost teacher proof in teaching reading with the latter working to keep students on task and not digress from the work at hand. Realism as a philosophy of instruction is involved here in that precise

right/wrong answers only, are wanted as responses by students. It can be determined precisely how many answers students got right in each program. Exactness is wanted in that a realist in philosophical orientation desires numerals to know correctness of a situation. Realists then believe that one can know reality as it truly exists. They are not satisfied with vague statements such as

1. the temperature reading is comfortable. Realists rather want to know the exact temperature reading, such as 73 degrees.
2. it is going to rain today. Rather, the realist wishes to know the probability for rain falling, such as an eighty percent chance. The eighty percent probability may need to include a margin of error stated numerically.
3. I wear a large hat size. Instead, realists would want the exact hat size to be stated, such as a size eight (Ediger, 2001, 61-66).

Realism as a philosophy of teaching calls for precision in language use when describing each facet of the reading program such as

1. specific learning activities to achieve the programmer's goals.
2. exact measurement of achievement for each small step in learning.
3. very tightly knit sequence so that a student should be successful in responding to each multiple choice test item (See Ediger, 1992- 1993, 15- 17).

## Principal's Knowledge of Word Recognition Skills

The school administrator needs to have good knowledge about the pros and cons of different word recognition skills in teaching students to read. The following techniques to recognize unknown words are advocated by selected reading specialists:

1. phonics with its emphasis upon associating sounds with symbols. The issue here deals with the consistency between sound (phoneme) and symbol (grapheme). There are consistencies as well as inconsistencies.
2. syllabication or dividing words into segments such as prefixes and suffixes in order that the unknown word might be identified. Syllabication skills, as well as phonics, place stress upon analyzing words. At issue here are those who advocate whole language approaches in helping students learn to read with its emphasis upon meaning in comprehension as compared to those who believe strongly in students also needing

assistance with phonics/syllabication in word identification.

3. context clues with learners substituting a meaningful word in place of the unknown word. This approach may also acceptable, generally, to whole language advocates.

The issue of phonics may be divided into teaching it as needed by the student or taught systematically. Systematic phonics has its very own scope and sequence, whereas phonics taught as needed is stressed only as the student individually encounters an unknown word (Ediger, 1997, 41-43).

## Knowledge of Reading Comprehension Skills

The school principal needs to have much knowledge of reading comprehension and the student (See Bruner, 1963, 33). Certainly, the ultimate goal or reading instruction is to assist students to achieve meaning from the graphemes in print discourse. Meanings need to be attained at diverse levels of complexity. Reading to acquire facts can be an important goal depending upon the relevancy and use made of the factual content. Second, reading to understand subject matter is vital as an objective of instruction. If meaning is not attached to what has been read, then the activity has been somewhat futile. Third, reading to apply information acquired may well be at the heart of viable objectives of reading instruction. The author noted an automobile mechanic who said he always had problems in school when reading of content was involved. And yet when repairing the author's ten year old car, the mechanic needed to get a Manual from upstairs in the garage to notice specifics in repairing an older car. The author looked at the wording in the Manual and must say that many good adult readers would have problems understanding the detailed ideas! If content is needed and can be applied, evidently highly complicated words and sentence structure can be in the offing. There needs to be a purpose involved in reading diverse selections in the curriculum. Fourth, critical thinking needs to be a major goal of reading instruction. There is so much information printed that a reader may truly be very gullible if all the content is considered factual. Thus, the reader needs to be able to analyze what has been read in terms of being accurate versus that which is inaccurate, biased or propaganda in intent. Fifth, creative thinking is necessary. Why? The learner needs to come up with novel, unique ideas. It is very important for students to engage in creative thought pertaining to what has been read, since

originality of ideas is necessary for new inventions and innovations to come about. The societal arena is not stable nor static but subject to the many possible changes necessary to move from where society is presently to something better. Sixth, the learner must be able to assess the value of subject matter read. Selected content is more valuable than the other due to involved purposes. Thus, specific subject matter acquired may be more utilitarian, than others, and is then used to solve a relevant problem. Judgments of the worth of subject matter is based upon desired criteria, such as its usefulness (See Ediger, 28, 11-17).

## In Closing

There are a plethora of things which a principal should know about the teaching of reading. Two broad ideas discussed were a) the principal's need to be highly knowledgeable of student word recognition skills and, b) the principal's knowledge of learner comprehension skills of subject matter read.

Additional items for the principal to have much knowledge about emphasizes issues such as

1. testing versus port folio development to ascertain learner achievement in reading.
2. homogeneous versus heterogeneous grouping of students for reading instruction (Ediger, 1999, 46- 55).
3. student individual versus collaborative endeavors in the teaching of reading.
4. a teacher determined versus a student centered sequence in reading instruction.
5. measurably stated versus a more open ended set of objectives for student attainment.

A positive learning environment needs to be in the offing in which students develop a feeling of belonging and are recognized for achievements made in reading instruction.

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